

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 IO-14 ISO-00 SAB-01 OMB-01 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04

RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 /127 W

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R 261700Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4520

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

USMISSION GENEVA

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ROME 5814

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, VT, SA

SUBJECT: KING FEISAL RECEIVES RANKING VATICAN OFFICIAL

BEIRUT ALSO PASS USINT DAMASCUS

GENEVA FOR MEPC

SUMMARY: VATICAN CONSIDERS CARDINAL PIGNEDOLI'S VISIT TO
SAUDI ARABIA A BREAKTHROUGH OF MAJOR SIGNIFICANCE IN MOSLEM-
CATHOLIC RELATIONS, AND EXPECTS HEAVY PRESS COVERAGE TO GENERATE
FAVORABLE IMPACT THROUGHOUT MOSLEMWORLD WHICH COULD IMPROVE
CLIMATE FOR CATHOLIC CHURCH. MEETINGS CONCENTRATED ON
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SPIRITUAL THEMES TO EXCLUSION OF POLITICS WITH EXCEPTION OF PASSING

REFERENCE TO HOLY PLACES, BUT JERUSALEM PER SE NOT DISCUSSED. DETAILED NARRATIVE WHICH CARDINAL PROVIDED US OF THIS UNUSUALLY WARM FIRST WELCOMING OF CATHOLIC LEADER AT HIGHEST LEVELS SAUDI SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT FOLLOWS. END SUMMARY.

1. CARDINAL SERGIO PIGNEDOLI, PRESIDENT OF VATICAN SECRETARIAT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS, GAVE US FULL DESCRIPTION OF APRIL 26 OF HIS APRIL 22-25 VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA WHERE HE HAD HIGH-LEVEL MEETINGS WITH GOVERNMENT AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS, INCLUDING AUDIENCE WITH KING FEISAL. PIGNEDOLI DELIVERED PAPAL MESSAGE TO KING WHICH PURELY RELIGIOUS IN NATURE, DEALING MAINLY WITH DESIRE TO CONTINUE AND EXPAND INCHOATE MOSLEM-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE. RELIGIOUS CHARACTER MAINTAINED THROUGHOUT ALL TALKS, WITH BOTH SIDES SCRUPULOUSLY AVOIDING POLITICALIZATION OF ENCOUNTERS, THEREFORE QUESTION OF JERUSALEM DID NOT ARISE. SAUDIS DID NOTE, HOWEVER, THEIR PREOCCUPATION FOR FUTURE OF HOLY PLACES IN GENERAL AND ONLY IN THIS CONTEXT DID PIGNEDOLI MENTION THAT JEWS AS WELL AS MOSLEMS AND CHRISTIANS HAD LEGITIMATE CONCERNS OVER FUTURE OF HOLY PLACES. WHEN KING FEISAL LAID BLAME FOR PRESENT DIFFICULTY OVER HOLY PLACES TO ZIONISTS, TO WHOM HE ATTRIBUTED TOTAL INDIFFERENCE TO RELIGIOUS ASPECTS, PIGNEDOLI COUNTERED THAT SOME ZIONISTS MAY BE INDIFFERENT TO RELIGION BUT HE ASSURED KING THAT THERE GREAT NUMBER OF SINCERE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN ISRAEL WHO DEEPLY CONCERNED OVER PRESERVATION OF ACCESS AND CONTROL OF JEWISH HOLY SITES. BOTH PIGNEDOLI AND HIS HOSTS AGREED THAT UNITED NATIONS MUST BE INVOLVED IN FINDING SOLUTION TO PROBLEM OF HOLY PLACES.

2. ON BASIS OF LONG-STANDING SAUDI SUGGESTION THAT PIGNEDOLI PAY CALL ON KING FEISAL, DATING FROM TIME OF PIGNEDOLI'S 1972 VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA, VATICAN MADE REQUEST THROUGH SAUDI EMBASSY IN ROME. LAST WEEK SAUDI AMBASSADOR CALLED PIGNEDOLI TO SAY THAT HIS VISA HAD BEEN APPROVED AND THAT AUDIENCE WAS SET FOR APRIL 23. AMBASSADOR TOLD CARDINAL HE COULD BE EXPECTED TO BE MET AT AIRPORT, AND THAT HE WOULD BE TAKEN TO HIS HOTEL AND INFORMED OF DETAILS FOR MEETINGS. WHEN PIGNEDOLI, TOGETHER WITH AMERICAN MSGR. JAMES NOLAN AND LEBANESE PRIEST, FR. TABET, WHO ACTED AS INTERPRETER, DEPARTED ROME NO ONE FROM SAUDI EMBASSY WAS AT AIRPORT. ON ARRIVAL IN JIDDA, PIGNEDOLI PARTY DUMBFOUNDED TO BE WELCOMED BY FULL MILITARY HONOR GUARD AND KING'S BROTHER

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WHO PIGNEDOLI SAID IS GOVERNOR OF JIDDA DISTRICT. PARTY WAS THEN ESCORTED TO SPECIAL GUEST HOUSE RESERVED FOR CHIEFS OF STATE AND OTHER VISITING DIGNITARIES. FROM MOMENT OF ARRIVAL, PIGNEDOLI SAID, ATMOSPHERE WAS EXTREMELY WARM AND BROTHERLY. AT AUDIENCE WITH KING, MINISTER OF JUSTICE, WHO ALSO CHIEF OF ULEMA, READ STATEMENT WHICH AUGURS WELL FOR FUTURE MOSLEM-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE. PIGNEDOLI ALSO ENTERTAINED AT FORMAL DINNER WITH ALL MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT PRESENT. CARDINAL HAD INTENDED TO WEAR HIS FULL HABIT

TO AUDIENCE WITH KING, BUT HIS LUGGAGE WAS MISPLACED SO HE OBLIGED TO APPEAR IN SIMPLE CLERICAL BUSINESS SUIT. (INCIDENTALLY, HE WAS FIRST CHRISTIAN CLERGYMAN TO APPEAR IN RELIGIOUS DRESS IN SAUDI ARABIA, POINT NOTED WITH PLEASURE BY HIS HOSTS AND NUMBER OF AMERICANS WITH WHOM HE CAME INTO CONTACT.) PIGNEDOLI APOLOGIZED TO KING FOR APPEARING IN HIS PRESENCE SO INFORMALLY, EXPLAINING THIS DUE TO LOSS OF LUGGAGE AND NOT TO LACK OF RESPECT. KING LAUGHED AND PROMISED TO SEND HIM A SAUDI ROBE WHICH ARRIVED SAME EVENING AT PIGNEDOLI'S RESIDENCE.

3. WISHING TO AVOID POLEMICS, PIGNEDOLI DID NOT RAISE TOUCHY QUESTION OF BUILDING CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN SAUDI ARABIA. (COMMENT: NOW THAT ITALIAN GOVERNMENT HAS GIVEN PERMISSION FOR THE BUILDING OF A MOSQUE IN ROME, IT CAN BE EXPECTED, HOWEVER, THAT VATICAN WILL RAISE THIS QUESTION AT A LATER DATE.) PIGNEDOLI SAID PRESS COVERAGE OF HIS VISIT IN SAUDI MEDIA EXTREMELY HEAVY, WITH PICTURES AND STORIES ON FIRST PAGES OF ALL NEWSPAPERS. THIS, HE FEELS, WILL HAVE FAVORABLE WORLDWIDE IMPACT ON MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS, SINCE MOSLEMS FREQUENTLY INFLUENCED ON RELIGIOUS ISSUES BY KING FEISAL. SAUDI MINISTER OF INFORMATION WENT OUT OF HIS WAY TO EXPRESS TO PIGNEDOLI HIS PLEASURE OVER VISIT AND SAID HE VERY PLEASED TO GIVE AS MUCH PUBLICITY TO IT AS POSSIBLE.

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RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 /127 W

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R 261700Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

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4. ON ARRIVAL ROME SAUDI AMBASSADOR MET PIGNEDOLI AND APOLOGIZED FOR NOT BEING AT AIRPORT FOR DEPARTURE. AMBASSADOR BLAMED IMPRECISE INFORMATION FROM JIDDA FOR THIS OVERSIGHT. PIGNEDOLI SAID HE HOPES TO OBTAIN POPE'S APPROVAL THIS WEEK TO PUBLISH IN "L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO" TEXTS OF POPE'S LETTER TO KING FEISAL, KING'S REPLY AND STATEMENT BY SAUDI MINISTER OF JUSTICE.

5. PIGNEDOLI SAID HE HAD A NUMBER OF LONG AND FRIENDLY TALKS WITH MEMBERS OF ULEMA ON WIDE VARIETY OF SUBJECTS. THESE SPIRITUAL LEADERS GENERALLY EXHIBITED DEPLORABLE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF LIFE IN WEST, MOST OF THEIR INFORMATION APPARENTLY BEING GAINED FROM SENSATIONAL PRESS AND MOVIES. PIGNEDOLI REPORTED THAT SEVERAL
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BEARDED ELDERS KEPT SAYING THAT EUROPE IS AN ABOMINATION, MORALS ARE SO TERRIBLE, WHAT CAN BE DONE TO SAVE IT FOR FUTURE? IN CONTRAST TO THIS MORALIZING BY RELIGIOUS ELDERS, SEVERAL YOUNGER MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT AND PRINCES WHO HAD BEEN EDUCATED ABROAD TOLD PIGNEDOLI THEY FOUND LIFE VERY DIFFICULT IN PURITANICAL SAUDI ARABIA.

6. PIGNEDOLI REPORTED THAT VISIT OF SAUDI MINISTER OF JUSTICE WHO ALSO ULEMA CHIEF, EXPECTED HERE IN EARLY MAY HAS BEEN POSTPONED TO LATTER HALF OF OCTOBER. MAIN REASON FOR POSTPONEMENT WAS SAUDIS' DESIRE NOT TO VISIT FRANCE, WHICH ALSO ON ITINERARY, AT TIME OF FRENCH ELECTIONS.

7. PIGNEDOLI SAID VISIT SHOULD DEFINITELY BE VIEWED AS SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN CATHOLIC-MOSLEM RELATIONS, A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH IN EXPANDING DIALOGUE. ONE COSMETIC CHANGE HE HOPES TO ANNOUNCE SOON IS CHANGE OF NAME OF HIS OFFICE FROM SECRETARIAT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS TO SECRETARIAT FOR GREAT WORLD RELIGIONS.

8. COMMENT: CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS BEEN COMPETING FOR CONVERTS WITH ISLAM IN SEVERAL AREAS OF WORLD, PARTICULARLY SUB-SAHARA AFRICA, AND SUDDEN WARMING OF RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA WOULD BE INSTRUMENTAL IN DAMPENING MOSLEM-CATHOLIC FRICTION IN AREAS OF CONTACT. VATICAN APPROACHES ITS CONTACTS WITH NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS IN CONVICTION THAT ALL RELIGIOUS PEOPLE SHOULD COOPERATE

IN COMMON GOAL OF CONFRONTING MASSIVE MATERIALISTIC AND ANTI-RELIGIOUS FORCES, AN ARGUMENT WHICH, PIGNEDOLI SAID, EVOKED GREAT SYMPATHY DURING HIS VISIT IN ARABIA. QUITE OBVIOUSLY, HOWEVER, DESIRE TO ACHIEVE A MODUS VIVENDI WITH ISLAM IN AREAS WHERE BOTH RELIGIONS ARE ACTIVELY PROSELYTIZING IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO VATICAN. ON POLITICAL SIDE, COOPERATION BETWEEN SAUDI ARABIA AND VATICAN CAN PROBABLY DO MUCH TO NEUTRALIZE QADHAFI'S ZEAL WHICH HAS HAD AT TIMES ANTI-CATHOLIC TINGE. VATICAN SEES RECENT JALLUD VISIT TO POPE AS EFFORT TO PATCH UP SOME OF DAMAGE QADHAFI HAS DONE IN HIS CAMPAIGN AGAINST CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LIBYA. PIGNEDOLI ATTRIBUTED WARMTH OF HIS WELCOME PURELY TO SAUDI DESIRE TO COOPERATE ON A RELIGIOUS PLANE, AND DENIED THAT SAUDIS MIGHT ANTICIPATE VATICAN SUPPORT ON SUCH POLITICAL QUESTIONS AS RETURN OF JERUSALEM TO ARAB CONTROL.

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9. WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY JIDDA'S ANALYSIS OF PIGNEDOLI VISIT.
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Message Attributes

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Draft Date: 26 APR 1974
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Disposition Case Number: n/a
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